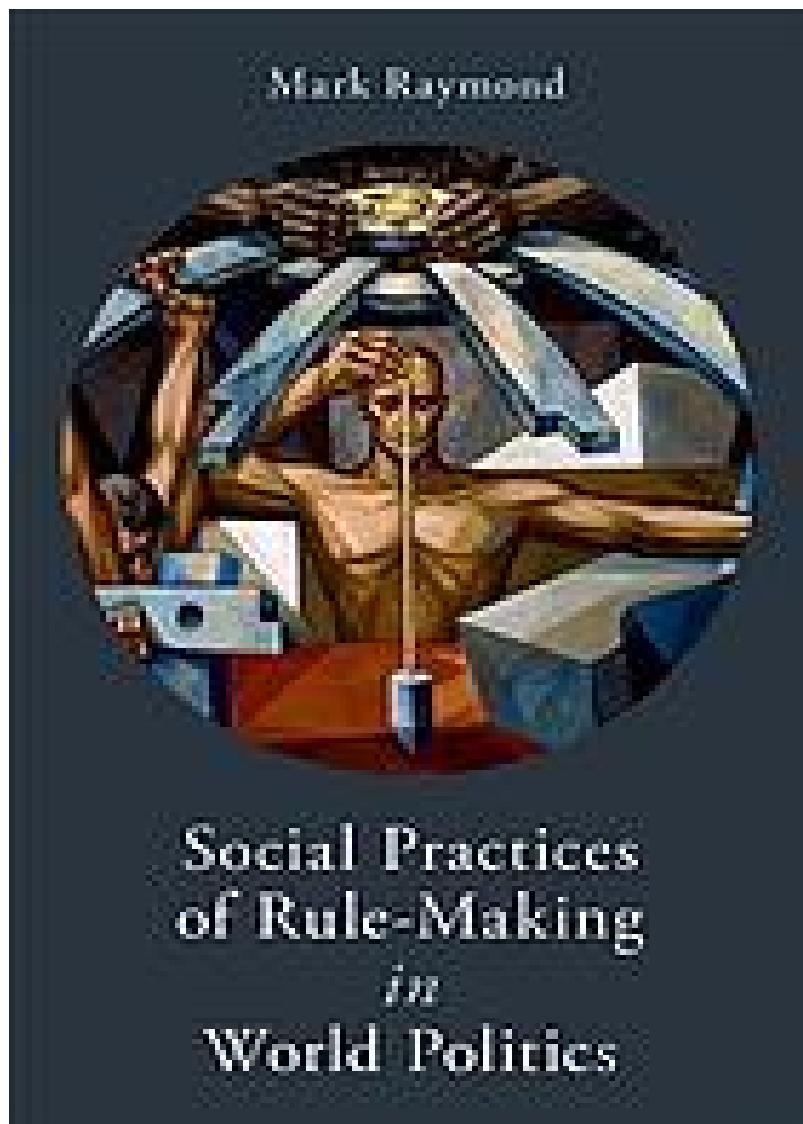


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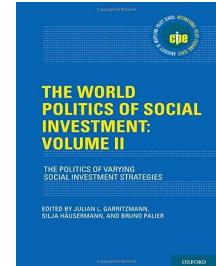


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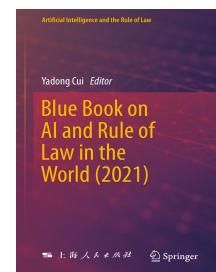
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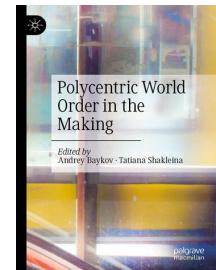
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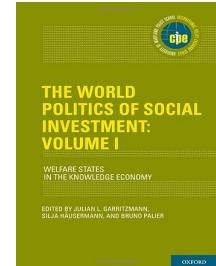
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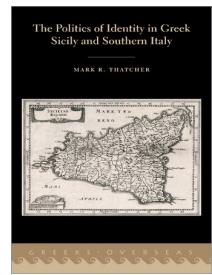
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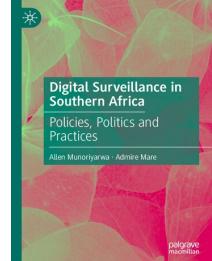
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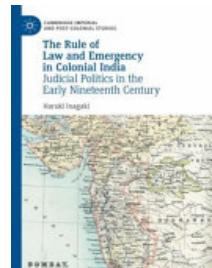
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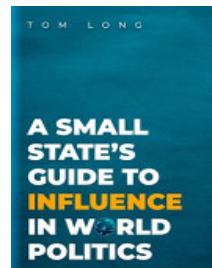
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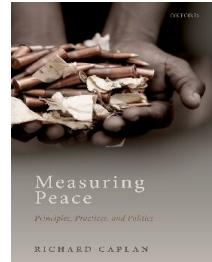
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in
World Politics

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MARK RAYMOND

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Introduction

It is commonplace to assert that we live in a rule-based global order, though assessments of the vitality and future trajectory of that order vary widely. This book takes the existence of such an order as its starting point, and seeks to contribute greater understanding of its nature and dynamics. Perhaps the most crucial question about this order is how its substantive contents (i.e., the rules) are determined and changed. That is the fundamental question that this book seeks to answer.

The constructivist literature identifies a number of mechanisms and processes—such as norm creation, social learning, strategic social construction, socialization, persuasion, contestation, and others—by which actors accomplish both the continuous reproduction and transformation of the rules, institutions, and regimes that constitute their worlds. However, it is less clear how these mechanisms *relate* to each other. Are they synonyms? Alternative explanations? Is it a matter of scope conditions, in which some mechanisms predominate in some circumstances while different ones are at work in others? In order to maximize the comparability of existing and future constructivist empirical research, and to avoid conceptual duplication, it is important that these questions be resolved. However, this proliferation of mechanisms also raises two deeper questions for which the field thus far lacks clear answers: (1) how do actors know *how* to engage in all the various processes available to them for changing or reproducing norms and rules, and (2) how do they know *when* to utilize one mechanism rather than another?

The answer, I argue, is that participants in world politics are also simultaneously engaged in an ongoing social practice of rule-making, interpretation, and application. This social practice of rule-making is itself governed by procedural rules. These rules about rule-making are analogues to what the legal philosopher H. L. A. Hart referred to as secondary rules (Hart 1994). They provide an instruction manual that enables actors to engage in contextually appropriate modalities for making and interpreting rules, and for applying rules to novel cases.

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The procedural rules that constitute practices of rule-making in specific social settings do more than help actors understand how to engage in various processes for making and interpreting rules. They also play a vital role in determining the success or failure of individual proposals about rules, because actors will typically evaluate others' proposals according to the requirements of the relevant procedural rules as they understand them. Thus, proposals advanced in a manner consistent with relevant procedural rules are (all things equal) more likely to be accepted than those advanced in a manner inconsistent with these rules.

By identifying a crucial overlooked social practice in the international system, the book contributes to describing the international system and its operation. It also contributes to explaining the form, process, and timing of changes in rules and institutions at the global level, as well as to explaining the success or failure of particular attempts to change those rules and institutions. In doing so, it makes four significant contributions to International Relations (IR) theory. First, it shows how actors know how and when to use various means to change rules and institutions, as well as how they know how to respond to such efforts by other actors. Second, the book shows how attention to procedural rules enhances the ability of practice-turn constructivist approaches to specify the content and account for the existence of particular practices. It also extends the range of applications of practice-turn constructivism to rule-making itself—a highly consequential practice endemic to virtually all social settings, but one that has largely escaped study in the context of the international system. Third, the book shows that this practice of making, interpreting, and applying rules is vital to understanding the causal mechanisms and processes associated with both the reproduction and transformation of social institutions. Choice between substantively similar proposals turned on procedural grounds. Practices of rule-making led to unanticipated outcomes. Actors continued to utilize accepted practices of rule-making even when they proved inconvenient or counterproductive. They commonly portrayed these practices as closely connected to their understandings of basic values and of the proper goals and purposes of political community. The cases also show that social practices of rule-making are vital to explaining several outcomes across the cases that are at odds with the expectations of prevailing theories. Finally, the book connects the literature on global governance to the literature on the international system. It shows that practices of global governance are centrally concerned with making, interpreting, and applying rules, and argues for placing global governance at the heart of the study of the international system and its dynamics. In doing so, it also builds on the emerging literature on hierarchy in the international system by foregrounding the authoritative nature of legitimate rules and the ways that rules can authorize actors to make certain decisions—including decisions about making, interpreting, and applying rules. The presence of these kinds of authoritative rules suggests that despite

the important advances contained in recent work in authority and hierarchy in the international system, increased attention to procedural rules for rule-making and the social practices of rule-making they constitute and govern offers important benefits.

Plan of the Book

The first chapter contains the conceptual and theoretical arguments, while the final four chapters present cases that demonstrate the existence and operation of a social practice of rule-making, and show that the procedural rules constituting and regulating this practice simultaneously enable and constrain actors both in making and evaluating attempts to change rules and institutions in the international system. As I have already presented the theoretical argument in brief, I will not elaborate further here on chapter 1.

I examine four cases: (1) the social construction of great power management in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars; (2) the creation of a rule against the use of force, except in cases of self-defense and collective security, as enshrined first in the Kellogg-Briand Pact; (3) contestation of the international system by al-Qaeda in the period immediately following the 9/11 attacks; and (4) efforts to establish norms for state conduct in the cyber domain conducted in the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly.

These cases each consist of multiple attempts to alter social rules and institutions—some of which failed and some of which succeeded. Overall, the cases support my argument’s core claims: proposals for change in rules were typically presented and evaluated according to relevant secondary rules; properly presented proposals were more likely to be accepted than improperly presented ones; deviations from accepted practices of rule-making and rule interpretation were consistently met with an expected range of discursive responses including denial, justification, and criticism; and, especially in the al-Qaeda case, disagreement over secondary rules resulted in acrimony and an inability to conduct a joint process of rule-making.

The deliberate selection of both difficult and important cases enhances confidence in these findings. All the cases examined touch centrally on issues of international security. The expectation of mainstream IR theories is that such cases are least amenable to the influence of ideational factors. In the realm of “high politics,” at least in cases where the strategic context is seen as threatening, considerations of material power and interest are generally believed to predominate. Contra these expectations, the evidence clearly shows rule-guided behavior as well as concern on the part of key actors with the standards of appropriateness for conduct in rule-making and rule interpretation established by

relevant procedural rules. Actors knowingly engaged in practices of rule-making, and this social practice clearly shaped the ultimate outcome in each of the cases examined.

The cases stand out for their importance even among the universe of possible cases involving contestation of rules and institutions related to international security. The construction of practices of great power management marked a critical step toward the modern system of active, multilateral collaboration in the day-to-day governance of the international system; the world's oldest inter-governmental organization (the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, or CCNR) was established by the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna. Likewise, the Kellogg-Briand Pact's rule against the use of force except in cases of self-defense or collective security was preserved in the Charter of the United Nations, and marked a clear diminution of the sovereign prerogatives of modern states. The 9/11 attacks are part of a sustained challenge to the basic practices of the international system. Al-Qaeda and its supporters prompted controversial responses by the United States—some of which constituted further proposals to change key international rules and institutions. In addition, al-Qaeda's actions directly inspired the Islamic State, which has taken up a similar cause. The contentious, fractured dialogue between Islamic fundamentalists and officials embedded in the international system highlights the risk of a possible breakdown in the legitimacy of contemporary international practices of rule-making and interpretation. Finally, agreement among states on making, interpreting, and applying rules of international law appears to have facilitated the emergence of agreement on basic norms for state conduct in the cyber domain despite the persistence of contention and conflict over a variety of cyber issues. If practices of rule-making, interpretation, and application shape the outcome of such crucial cases in International Relations, it seems reasonable to conclude that the practice is operative in less contentious cases, with the important proviso that this may change if the legitimacy of current practices deteriorates.

Chapter 2 examines the social construction of the Concert system in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. Statesmen employed secondary rules constituting a clear practice for making and interpreting social rules in order to moderate the conflict potential of the international system. They accomplished this task by establishing new practices of active collective conflict management that accorded special rights and responsibilities to great powers. Such institutional devices survived the formal Concert system, and continue to inform state practice. While other accounts have noted the institutional innovations of 1815, none have identified the role of a rule-governed practice of rule-making in accounting for the outcome. The case also clearly demonstrates the potential gains from relatively greater social competence in practices of rule-making and rule interpretation. Metternich and, to a lesser extent, Castlereagh proved able to

leverage social competence both to achieve their own goals and to defeat undesirable proposals made by other actors. While historians and biographers have highlighted the key roles of both men, and while political scientists have noted the importance of skill as a power resource, the book advances knowledge by identifying a *particular* skill of critical importance—skill at performing social practices of rule-making and interpretation.

Chapter 3 revisits the standard interpretation of the interwar period as a momentous failure of statecraft resulting from liberal or “utopian” policies. The Kellogg-Briand Pact fundamentally altered the international system by rendering war illegal except in cases of self-defense and collective security; this new rule survived the Second World War and is enshrined in clearly recognizable form in the Charter of the United Nations. Notably, this outcome was not the initial intention of either of the two men whose names the agreement bears, nor of their governments. Instead, it is attributable in large part to tactical efforts by both the French and American governments to force the other to abandon the issue or accept a disadvantageous bargain by manipulating and tactically employing procedural rules. Thus, the case shows that these rules do not simply constrain actor behavior; in at least some circumstances, they can play key roles in generating initially unintended outcomes. Further, the treaty prompted consistent responses from a broad array of states. Not only did the treaty gain near-universal acceptance, states routinely identified the same political concerns with the text and, most notable, reached similar evaluative conclusions on issues of concern by employing similar procedures and lines of reasoning. The treaty also prompted socially competent replies from two relative newcomers to the international system (Japan and the Soviet Union). This pattern suggests broad familiarity with, and general acceptance of, applicable procedural rules.

Chapter 4 examines the attempt by al-Qaeda to refashion the international system via a coordinated strategy of terror attacks and public messages, and the corresponding response of the American government. The case covers the period from al-Qaeda’s 1996 “Declaration of Jihad” to the American intervention in Iraq in March 2003. This delimitation of the case allows the evaluation of several discrete proposals for alterations in the rules and institutions governing the international system. It also examines the case prior to the effect of the Iraq War, which shifted attention toward the legitimacy of the American intervention. My central finding in this case is that the practice of rule-making, interpretation, and application was substantially inhibited by a “Tower of Babel” effect; each side relied almost exclusively on its own culturally prescribed secondary rules, rendering meaningful engagement exceedingly difficult. This highlights the robustness of the generic practice of rule-making, which exists across cultural divides and which is highly resistant to compromise. The case is notable for the unusual emotional valence surrounding the participants’ positions. Both

sides connected procedural legitimacy to notions of “the good life,” and thus to fundamental questions about justice that have been largely overlooked in IR scholarship (Welch 2014). These findings shed light on efforts by the Islamic State to articulate a critique of the international system, and have implications for efforts to undermine its attractiveness as a political project. They also illustrate the danger in an increasingly culturally heterogeneous international system if greater consensus on procedural rules for rule-making cannot be forged.

Finally, chapter 5 investigates efforts to create norms for state conduct in the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), focusing on efforts in the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. While the First Committee has been engaged in work on these questions since 1998, a 2013 report by the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security (GGE) contained an important advance in state thinking about these issues. It asserted that “international law, and in particular the Charter of the United Nations, is applicable and is essential to maintaining peace and stability and promoting an open, secure, peaceful and accessible ICT environment.” Beyond the UN Charter, it specifically enumerated state sovereignty, human rights, and the law of state responsibility as among the applicable bodies of international law governing state use of ICTs (UNGA 2013a, 8).

Remarkably, this rapid progress on norms for state conduct in the cyber domain came amid two trends not conducive to norm development: (1) a precipitous decline in diplomatic relations between Russia and most advanced industrial democracies; and (2) increased contention over Internet governance and cybersecurity issues at the global level. Despite these obstacles, state representatives to the GGE engaged in a rule-governed social practice of applying old rules to new cases. They drew on existing rules of diplomacy and international law to advance their positions on the most desirable and appropriate rules to govern state use of ICTs. These rules simultaneously empowered and constrained state representatives in advancing their positions and in evaluating proposals made by their counterparts. The rejection of a Russian proposal for a new international treaty in favor of an alternate approach based on applying existing rules of international law demonstrates the robustness of existing rule-making practices in the international system. This is especially true given that this position was endorsed by a diverse group of countries with different values, interests, and capabilities in the cyber domain—and that it occurred during a period in which cyber issues have become increasingly contentious. This agreement represents only a beginning in this crucial frontier for the rule-based global order, and it is likely that these rules will still be violated quite frequently by some actors. However, the public declaration that international law is applicable in

the cyber domain places processes of rule-making and interpretation on a much more stable foundation by establishing agreement on the applicable secondary rules. This enables violations to be identified and criticized more easily and effectively.

The book concludes by consolidating its contributions to IR theory. It makes the case that the book improves upon existing specifications of the international system by identifying an overlooked class of social practices pertaining to rule-making, interpretation, and application. It shows that the book provides insight about ways to deal with the problem of comparing and perhaps consolidating the large number of mechanisms identified in the constructivist literature for creating and altering intersubjective knowledge such as rules. It argues that attention to procedural rules about rule-making and the social practices they constitute and govern can improve upon existing constructivist tools for explaining change in the rules and institutions that structure international systems, both in explaining the form, process, and timing of change, and also in explaining the success or failure of specific attempts. And, finally, it links social practices of rule-making with processes and institutions of global governance. In doing so, it demonstrates the importance of global governance to the study of the international system; and by foregrounding the importance of authoritative rules in the international system, it suggests the potential that additional focus on secondary rules and social practices of rule-making can expand upon existing understandings of authority in the international system, and thereby enhance the emerging literature on hierarchy and authority in International Relations.

CHAPTER 1

Social Practices of Rule-Making

The everyday conduct of International Relations involves a great deal of ongoing effort to make, interpret, and apply social rules. This effort can be collectively understood as a social practice. Like all social practices, this practice of making, interpreting, and applying rules is itself governed by a set of procedural rules. These procedural rules have changed over time and, like all rules, continue to exist only as they are instantiated in practice by actors. These rules both empower and constrain actors in making, interpreting, and applying social rules. And, finally, these procedural rules differentially empower and constrain different actors.

This practice of rule-making, interpretation, and application is vital to understanding the causal mechanisms and processes associated with both the reproduction and transformation of institutions, and thus to explaining the form and timing of an important subset of change in the international system. The procedural rules constituting this practice provide an instruction manual that enables authorized actors to engage in contextually appropriate ways of making and interpreting rules, and for applying rules to particular cases. Accordingly, they play a vital role in determining the success or failure of specific proposals for change in the rules of the game in the international system, because actors typically evaluate such proposals according to their understanding of the relevant procedural rules. Proposals for social change advanced in a manner consistent with relevant procedural rules are (all things equal) more likely to be accepted than those advanced in a manner inconsistent with these rules.

If I am correct, we should see particular kinds of evidence. First, actors should present and evaluate proposed rules or interpretations of rules in a manner consistent with relevant procedural rules. That is, they should engage in both critical and justificatory behavior that makes reference to such procedural rules. Second, to the extent that procedural rules are causally effective, more procedurally competent proposals and interpretations should be more likely to generate agreement than less procedurally competent proposals and interpretations.

This argument does not require that actors engage in this practice perfectly sincerely. Actors can comply with rules for a variety of reasons, and often do so with mixed motives. What matters is that the rules shape behavior—simultaneously empowering and constraining actors as they pursue both their values and their interests.

In this chapter, I briefly deal with definitions of some key concepts in my argument, review relevant constructivist literature and identify the central research questions that motivate the book, and develop an account of this social practice of rule-making and its significance for IR theory. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the methods and evidence employed in the four empirical case studies that comprise the remainder of the book.

Rules

The starting point of this book is that rules are fundamental to human social life, and that this is no less true of the international system than it is of domestic politics or any other kind of social context. As Nicholas Onuf has written, “many, perhaps most, deeds are responses to rules” (1994, 18). Accordingly, the book belongs in the diverse constructivist body of IR scholarship. The breadth of this community complicates efforts to make concise theoretical statements, and resolving debates within constructivism is beyond the scope of my purpose in this book. Broadly, I situate my work at the intersection of rule-oriented and practice-turn constructivisms. I treat rules as both formal and informal, and as simultaneously regulative and constitutive. Further, I argue that social practices are constituted and governed by procedural rules. However, actors live in social settings structured by multiple rule sets and in which actors have overlapping but not identical understandings about the content of these rules and how to apply them in particular cases. Accordingly, societies have additional practices of rule-making, interpretation, and application governed by rules about rules. These interpretive rules and practices are context-dependent, varying across cultures and across time. I begin by briefly elaborating the understandings of rules and other relevant social theoretic concepts that inform my efforts to demonstrate how procedural rules shape international outcomes.

Put simply, “rules are statements that tell people *what we should do*.” In so doing, they provide “a standard for people’s conduct in situations that we can identify as being alike and can expect to encounter” (Onuf 2013, 4). They “describe some class of actions and indicate whether these actions constitute warranted conduct on the part of those to whom these rules are addressed” (Onuf 1994, 10). In this respect, then, rules are very similar to norms—typically defined in constructivist research as a “standard of appropriate behavior for

actors with a given identity" (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891). Indeed, Onuf argues that the components of Stephen Krasner's classic definition of an international regime—"principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures" (Krasner 1982, 185)—"are all categories of rules" (Onuf 2013, 14). Throughout the book, I adopt this expansive understanding of norms as a subset of rules.

I also follow Onuf in maintaining that "all rules are always constitutive *and* regulative at the same time." Onuf explains that "by definition, rules regulate the conduct of agents because rules are normative—they tell agents what they should do." They are necessarily also constitutive because "the regulation of conduct constitutes the world within which such conduct takes place, whether agents intend this consequence or not" (Onuf 2013, 12). However, this dual character of rules is tempered by the reality that "some degree of functional specialization among rules is not only possible but likely." Insofar as this is the case, "a few rules are disproportionately weighty in constitutive effect" (Onuf 1994, 7).

Rules leave particular identifiable traces in the world. The most obvious are written rules of various kinds, including formal legal rules and more informal texts. However, whether or not rules are recorded in written form, "dealing with rules prompts people to talk about them, and involves them in the many arguments to which rules relate." Further, "by virtue of such talk, rules do exist—not just as inferences, but as things, however protean or transitory" (Onuf 1994, 6).

Since I take the position that rules are elementary to social life, it is necessary to be somewhat more specific about the scope of the book. I am particularly concerned with rules in two ways. First, I am concerned with the subset of procedural rules that pertains to procedures for making, interpreting, and applying rules—that is, with rules for rule-making. Such rules constitute and regulate what I argue are contextually specific social practices for rule-making. Though I believe such practices to be endemic to social life at all levels of analysis, the empirical scope of this book is what International Relations scholars traditionally refer to as the international system, which I understand expansively to include what scholars of the English School refer to as international society.¹ Second, I am concerned with the way these procedural rules and their associated practices of rule-making shape the ways that actors present and evaluate proposals for changes in other rules, and thus help explain the success or

¹ Systemic theorizing has a long history in International Relations, and crosses virtually every paradigmatic divide (see, among many others: Bull 2002; Waltz 1979; Gilpin 1981; Keohane 1984; Wendt 1999; Holsti 2004). That said, I do not claim that this system is hermetically sealed, or that international rules are completely divorced from the domestic level (Ruggie 1982; Putnam 1988; Milner 1991).

failure of particular attempts to change them. In particular, rule-governed social practices of rule-making offer the potential to build upon existing approaches to explaining the form, process, and timing of changes in the rules of the game for international relations.

Rules are closely related to several other important concepts in IR theory. Here, I deal briefly with the relationship of rules to language, institutions, identities, and practices. Language and speech are central to rule-oriented constructivism. Indeed, such variants of constructivism start from the premises that “language is action” and that “speech acts (promising, declaring, apologizing, etc.) are both plentiful and central to social life” (Duffy and Frederking 2009, 328). Onuf argues that “rules always and necessarily derive from performative speech—utterances through which people accomplish social ends directly.” Three forms of speech acts correspond to three types of rules: assertive speech acts to instruction rules; directive speech acts to directive rules; and commissive speech acts to commitment rules (Onuf 1994, 10–11). Instruction rules “inform agents about the world—the way things are, the way it works—and inform them what consequences are likely to follow if they disregard this information.” In contrast, “directive speech acts are recognizable as imperatives.” Finally, “commisive speech acts involve promises” and “give form to rules when hearers, as speakers, respond with promises of their own.” Such rules create “the *rights* and *duties* that agents know they possess with respect to other agents” (Onuf 2013, 11–12).

Procedural rules for rule-making and interpretation, the primary focus of this book, can take any of these three forms. Sets of procedural rules will almost certainly include rules of all three types. For example, instruction rules might establish the existence of a category of actor, such as states or international organizations, and specify criteria for identifying members of that class. Directive rules and commitment rules addressed to particular kinds of actors enumerate the various rights and responsibilities of different agents in making, interpreting, and applying rules. Additional instruction rules may provide relevant details about appropriate modalities for exercising and fulfilling these rights and responsibilities. Accordingly, this typology of rules is for the most part orthogonal to the argument I am making. As a result, I distinguish among instruction, directive, and commitment rules only where my argument specifically requires it.²

Christian Reus-Smit defines institutions as “stable sets of norms, rules, and principles that serve two functions in shaping social relations: they constitute actors as knowledgeable social agents, and they regulate behavior” (1999, 12–13). Onuf likewise regards rules as integral components of institutions, but

² On the relationship between these three types of rules and H. L. A. Hart’s notion of secondary rules, see Onuf (1994, 14).

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Exploring the Variety of Random Documents with Different Content

Mr. Sparks, a young man staying with the Poynters, who during the last year had contracted an unfortunate passion for photographing his friends, was now standing out on the lawn, with his instrument of torture before him, and his head buried in a dirty velveteen cloth. He "meant well," as they say, but he never did it. He was abnormally tall and thin, and his hair fell over his forehead; the atrocities that he had committed no doubt preyed upon his conscience. To add to his other misfortunes, he was a friend of Dicky Browne, who to-day was taking great joy out of him.

"We'll be taken in a group," decided Mr. Browne, after a long discussion; "we can be taken separately afterwards, if we have the courage."

He looked at Mrs. Poynter, who had been most eager to get a sitting all to herself. She was pretty, and she knew it, and why shouldn't others know it? She was unaware of Mr. Sparks's peculiar talent, certainly, or perhaps she would not have been so desirous of seeing herself or her children—two lovely little beings of six and eight—once again on paper.

"Now I'm ready, if you are!" roared Mr. Sparks from the centre of the lawn.

"One minute!" shouted back Dicky Browne.

He was settling everybody, and pulling out their skirts. This made all the women mad.

"Are you ready?" roared out Sparks again, who was suffocating from his incessant visits beneath the velveteen cloth. It was a very warm day.

"One moment." Dr. Dillwyn had just come in, and where was he to be placed? He made straight for Agatha, and Dicky could not fail to see the significance of the smile with which she greeted him.

"Is there room for me here?" That was his whisper.

"Yes, yes," she said softly, gently. So he laid his hand on the arm of her chair, and stood erect.

There was a moment of awful tension. All were putting on their worst smiles and the most fatally imbecile expression, and Mr. Sparks was about to withdraw the cap, when a lively crash was heard and a smothered shriek.

They all sprang to their feet, and the tableau was spoiled. It was Dicky, of course. As usual, he had chosen the frailest seat in the place as a support for his rather stout frame—this time a milking-stool of delicate proportions; and one of the legs had come off, and now Dicky and it were floundering together on the floor of the veranda, buried in one common ruin.

The party in the veranda broke up and went here and there through the gardens, or else back to the tennis-courts. Tea was going on in a large tent on the lawn, and presently Elfrida, who had seated herself in a garden-chair outside the tent, and had sent Lord Ambert for some coffee, saw Mr. Blount standing near her. Elfrida looked up at him. She was quite alone—a singular occurrence so far as she was concerned—and for the first time, therefore, she was able to look at Blount with a critical eye. It struck her first that he was the youngest-looking man she had ever seen, and then, for she was fond of analysis, she told herself she regarded him like that simply because Lord Ambert was so very far from young.

Presently Blount looked round and saw her, and such a light of gladness grew upon his face as could not be mistaken.

"Can't I do something for you?" asked he.

"You can indeed; you can sit here beside me and amuse me, and tell me things."

"Tell you things?" He laughed at this; he was feeling extraordinarily happy. "What can I tell you that could interest you?"

"Well, one thing," said this finished coquette, "your Christian name. When one likes a person, one always wants to know how those who love him call him."

She smiled at him divinely, bending here pretty head towards him. She looked very lovely in her exquisite gown—a delicate petunia shade, clouded with lace—and the curate, looking at her, lost his head a little. He looked back at her, with all the passionate and very real love he felt for her showing now openly within his honest young eyes.

Blount woke from his mad dream, and to a most unpleasant reality. The Rev. Thomas Blount was a name that could be seen very often on cards for soirees, or placards for temperance meetings, or invitations to tea for girls' friendly societies. It hurt him in some strange way that she had never noticed those cards and placards. If she had even liked him, she would have felt some such small interest in him.

"I'll tell you, of course," said he. Yet he hesitated. *Thomas!* How could he tell her his name was Thomas? It was, indeed, one of his greatest griefs that he had to sign himself so when he came to this parish. Thomas was such a respectable name!

"Ah, I know now!" cried Elfrida, as he hesitated. "It is Thomas. I saw it in a—"

"Oh, really, you know, it is *not* my name," said Blount. "I'm always called Tom by my friends."

"Yes?" Elfrida turned and gave him a wonderful little look from under her hat—a charming hat all covered with violets. "Am *I* your friend?" asked she.

"My friend?" he stammered, and then stopped. Something in her face, her eyes, that were looking over her shoulder at some one approaching, checked another word. He, too, looked hastily backwards, to see Ambert coming out of the tent and approaching them, a cup in his hand and a scowl upon his brow. Mrs. Greatorex and Miss Firs-Robinson were behind him.

CHAPTER XVI

He turned to Elfrida, his face pale and miserable. He hardly knew what he was saying.

"He is coming—Ambert, I mean. He will ask you to go and see the houses with him."

"Is that all?" Elfrida looked amused.

"He is going to ask you to marry him."

"Is *that* all!" She laughed now, merrily. Her lovely little face, that was so infantile, yet so strong and so determined beneath all its youth and sweetness, seemed now slightly mocking.

"Don't go with him," entreated Blount passionately. All in a moment the youth of his own face seemed to die from it. He looked strong and earnest. His eyes were lit with a fire she had not thought them capable of. She looked at him strangely for awhile. Then she smiled.

"Why should I not?" she asked gaily. She had quite recovered herself. Ambert was very close now, and she turned and smiled at him—a smile of encouragement.

He came up and gave her the cup she had asked for, not noticing Blount even by a bare nod. He made a point of being rude to Blount. She drank the coffee, and then consented to go with him to the vineeries. She rose, her small, graceful figure, slender as an elf's,

looking even more fragile than usual in her pale gown, and moved a step or two forward with Ambert at her side.

Blount rose too. The very bitterness of death seemed on him now. She was going—going from him for ever.

At that moment Elfrida turned her graceful neck, and stopped and held out her hand to him. The little trifler was true to her calling.

"Won't you come too, Mr. Blount? Do."

There was actual entreaty in her eyes. Blount would have refused her request but for that look. As a fact, Elfrida felt the proposal from Ambert was imminent, and though she desired it, she wilfully determined to put it off, as women sometimes will. Blount rose, and, regardless of Ambert's insolent air went with her towards the houses.

Miss Firs-Robinson laughed; she was having a right royal revenge.

"Elfrida's good to the poor, too; in fact, she's good to every one—except perhaps"—thoughtfully—"young men."

"To me," said Mrs. Greatorex spitefully, "she appears the very kindest girl I ever knew to young men, and, indeed, to old men, and *all* men. She seems to have no other thought than for them."

"Just so. I said she was a flirt; but when she's married to Ambert she'll be cured of that."

"When she *is*," said Mrs. Greatorex with emphasis and a peculiar smile.

Miss Firs-Robinson might have gone on again, adding more fuel to the fire, but a little rush of people out of the tent near them distracted her attention. Dicky Browne was leading, but was hard pressed by Agatha and Mrs. Poynter and a few others.

"What is it, Agatha?" asked Mrs. Greatorex, as the girl reached her.

"Sparks!" gasped Mr. Browne. "He says he wants to take us again."

"So we're flying—flying for our lives," said Dicky. "Stop us at your peril." He looked back. "Oh lawks, here he is!" said he; whereupon they all took to their heels again and disappeared into a bit of wood close to them.

Agatha was last; she turned aside, and, separating herself from the others, ran lightly up a little path that led towards a tangle of ferns and young trees—mere saplings. She knew the place well, and knew it to be solitary. No one would go there to-day, and she wanted to be alone to think. Half an hour ago Dillwyn had been called away to see a poor child in the village whose little hand had been badly scalded. He had passed Agatha when going, and had told her he would be back again in an hour or less. Without him the day seemed dull, and the thought of escaping from every one, of sitting alone in that small retreat until his return, was good to her. She wouldn't confess to herself that the idea of her getting away from Dr. Darkham had its charm too. She clung to the other thought. She could see the road by which Jack—she had grown to think of him as Jack—would return. Indeed, his shortest way would be straight through here. She told herself she was going to sit here and watch for his coming; and out of such telling no shame came to her heart. She loved him, and he loved her. And though he had not spoken, she believed he was waiting for her, until his prospects were brighter, surer. She laughed to herself over that. As if she cared about his prospects! She cared for nothing on earth but him himself—his dear, *dear* self.

She had gained her shelter now, and stood looking towards the road. Two of the young saplings were quite big boys now, and very tall for their age. They towered over *her*, at all events. They stood both together, and she stood between them, always with her beautiful face looking towards the road; and she twined her arms round these younglings, and so supported herself. All her thoughts

were given to Dillwyn. So engrossed were they, indeed, that she heard no footstep behind her—knew of no approach, until the voice she hated above all others sounded on her ear.

....

She felt she was as pale as death as she turned to confront him.

CHAPTER XVII

"Dr. Darkham! *You!*" Her tone was cold, almost haughty.

"Yes. I followed you!" He looked at her, his eyes resting on her. Such strange eyes, they seemed on fire! And his tone—it was one she had never heard before.

As for Darkham, he stood there looking at her, gloating on her beauty—the beauty for which he had sold his soul. How sweet she was—a thing born of the gods! So tall, so slender, so defiant, so divine!

But in all his dreams of her, had she ever been as beautiful as now? She had still her arms round the young trees—she was, indeed, clinging to them now, as if demanding support of them—and her small shapely head and slender figure showed through them as though they formed a living panel.

Something other than the longing to be always with her had urged him towards this interview. The fear of losing her altogether! He had seen the way she went, and had followed her, and had rightly judged that she was waiting here to see Dillwyn return.

He knew Mrs. Greatorex. Money was a god to her, and she would strongly urge Agatha to act as he desired. She would condone the haste of his proposal. He could explain away all that by saying he feared to lose her—by a judicious hint about Dillwyn's attentions. He knew how that would annoy her. And she was an obstinate and

determined woman, who would go all lengths to gain her own ends. He could see her to-night—a note would manage it.

"You followed me!" Her soft eyes flashed. "Why should you follow me?"

"You know," said Darkham. He advanced a step nearer to her. "You *must* know."

His voice now was shaken with passion, and his face was deadly white. He was alone with her, far from every one, and he was going to tell her that he loved her. To him it was the moment of his life.

"I know nothing. I desire to know nothing."

The girl had stepped out now from between the trees, and was standing before him, quite calm, but with a little droop of the lids he was not slow to interpret. It meant disdain. But he cared for nothing now, save his one mad longing to tell her.

"You do know," said he in a strange voice. "I dare you to say otherwise. You know that I love you." It was out. It was said. The very air was ringing with it. He repeated it. To himself it seemed that he was shouting the great news, but in reality his voice was low—intense. "I love you. I have loved you always— *always*. Even whilst that woman lived. You know that, too. I have seen it in your eyes so often. No, not a word! Let me speak.... I have been silent so long."

"To be silent for ever would be better," said Agatha. She was very pale, but she had a certain courage of her own, and it stood to her, so far, most valiantly. "You must see what folly this is. Why do you speak? What good will it do you?"

"It means life!" said Darkham. "What nights, what days have been filled with my vain longing for such an hour as this! To *say* it—to tell you how unutterably dear you are to me—has been my consuming passion since first we met. Often, often, when attending your aunt,

a craving to speak to you—to lay bare my heart—to take you in my arms—"

He moved towards her, and she shrank back affrightedly. After all, a girl's best courage does not amount to much.

"What!" said he, "do you think I would touch you? No, no!"

"You must be mad," said she. She was trembling now. "How can you talk to me like this?—to me, who—"

"Well?" said he—his voice was a question—"well?"

"Why go into it?" said the girl gently, touched by the horrible anguish in his face. "Is it not enough for you to—"

"To what?"—violently, as she hesitated to finish her sentence.

"Your words are enigmas; I would hear from your own lips the answers to them."

"As you insist," said Agatha calmly, "I shall finish it. To you, who"—slowly, defiantly—"are *abhorrent to me!*"

"You think to marry that young fool!" said he. "And I tell you you never shall. I shall not allow it. Your aunt will not allow it."

"Mrs. Greatorex is not my aunt," said Agatha. "But am I to understand, then, that you are going to bring *her* into this hateful matter?"

"I shall certainly tell her how things are," returned he doggedly.

"You would coerce me—you would compel me to accept you!" cried she miserably, a vision of Mrs. Greatorex's anger rising before her.

"I compel you in no wise! I would only have careful consideration where your best interests are concerned. I can supply you with all

that makes life bearable. I can surround you with luxuries—and Dillwyn, what can he do?"

"I don't want him to do anything," said Agatha slowly. She said nothing more for a moment and the meaning of her words sank into Darkham's heart. No, Dillwyn need do nothing. She loved him—love was sufficient! What more was wanting? Agatha's voice broke through his wretched thoughts. "I do not understand your allusions to Dr. Dillwyn. He is merely a friend, an acquaintance of mine. No more."

"No more!" He mimicked her tone, and burst into queer laughter.

"Would you swear to that? Ay! I suppose—and die for it—just because he has not said to you what I have said to-day. But you will never marry him. Mark that! You will marry me!"

"You mean that you will make Mrs. Greatorex my enemy about this," said the girl scornfully. "You will turn her against me."

"As for that," said he, "you are not the down-trodden slave you would describe. The law of to-day"—bitterly—"leaves most people very free. You are thoroughly protected."

"So far, yes; but you also know that my only home is with Mrs. Greatorex. If she were to turn against me—"

"Then I should take you in."

"Never!" said she strongly. "I would rather die on the roadside than have anything to do with you!"

"You think that now, but time changes most things, and poverty is hard to bear. You will listen to your aunt at last; and I—I who have loved you—I who have looked forward to such an hour as this—have looked to you as my salvation—"

"Dr. Darkham!"—she turned upon him passionately—"do not look at me at all. It is useless, believe me. Nothing under heaven could change my determination on this point. I have told you I would rather die than marry you. Look elsewhere and forget me, I entreat you."

She turned away from him and glanced once more up the road. Would he *never* come?

"Not in sight yet?" said Darkham, with a contemptuous laugh. "To keep you waiting so! What a dilatory lover!"

"I wish you would go away," said she quietly.

"That you may see him alone? A most reasonable request." He laughed again harshly, with forced merriment; then suddenly he fell on his knees before her, and caught hold of her gown.

"Agatha, for the sake of the heaven I have lost, hear me! You *must* hear me! See—I am at you very feet! Give me a word—a word—only *one!* Just one word of hope. Oh, my soul, if you only knew how I feel towards you—what I have *done* for you! Agatha, have pity!" He seemed hardly to know what he was saying. He caught the hem of her gown, and pressed it to his lips. The girl, distressed, horrified, laid her hand upon his head to press it back, away from her. To him the pressure of that soft, hasty hand seemed like a benediction.

He rose slowly, staggering a little, and looked up at her; she had moved away towards an opening in the hedge that led to the road, and was holding up her hand as if to attract somebody. Her face was white, terrified; even in this strange moment he felt a sensation of gladness in the thought that he could move her some way, even to fear.

In another minute Dillwyn had sprung over the stile and was beside her. He looked quietly from her to Darkham.

"I saw you," said the girl, laughing a little hurriedly. "And this was your nearest way back, you know, and—"

"And as I am due to see a patient now," said Dr. Darkham, drawing out his watch and examining it closely, "I am glad you have come in time to see Miss Nesbitt back to the grounds."

CHAPTER XVIII

"Why don't you like him?"

It was the next morning, and Mrs. Greatorex, lounging on a sofa in her bedroom, was regarding Agatha with a rather stern air.

Dr. Darkham, true to the promise he had made to himself, had gone to Rickton Villa the previous night, had sought a private interview with her, and told her all: of his admiration for her niece, of his fear of losing her unless he spoke at once, of his belief that Dillwyn was in love with her also, and of the settlements he was prepared to make.

These last were very handsome. For the past twenty years of his successful life, he had saved far more than he had spent—refusing to go much into society or to entertain, because of his wife's deficiencies, though by his marriage with that wife he had been made a rich man. There had been no settlements on his marriage with her, and all her fortune was now within his grasp. It was with that, indeed, he intended to buy Agatha.

Mrs. Greatorex's ambitious heart rose to the bait. The sum he proposed to settle on Agatha was considerably more than she had even hoped for, and during the past week or two she had been led by Darkham to understand that he loved her "niece," as she always called Agatha.

Darkham, watching her, half smiled to himself—she was so easily read, and so sordid, and so mean, with all her absurd aristocratic

airs and hints at the greatness of her family that did not know her.

He went on carefully. He fought his way with ease. He even ventured to tell her in a subdued whisper that he had never really cared for his first wife—it was a boyish infatuation, and she was older than he was—and—well, the same old vulgar story that we all know by heart and despise and don't believe in.

Mrs. Greatorex chose to believe it, however. At the last she gave him to understand that she would urge her niece by every means in her power to accept his offer. Her refusal of him that afternoon was probably mere girlish embarrassment, she said. As for that suggestion about Dr. Dillwyn, she was quite positive there was nothing in it.

She was looking now at the "dearest girl"—who was looking back at with anxious eyes. She did not appear "shy," however—only very anxious and unhappy.

She did not answer, so Mrs. Greatorex went on,—

"He told me he had spoken to you yesterday, and that you had refused him. You must have been out of your senses when you did that. He is prepared to make splendid settlements—"

"I shouldn't object to settlements if—if I didn't object to—him," said Agatha in a low voice.

"To him! To Dr. Darkham? What can you see to object to in him? He is handsome—clever—"

"He is old," said Agatha, trifling with the question as if to gain time.

"*That* is the last epithet to apply to him. My dear Agatha, consider. He is clever, as I say, and learned, and so kind and thoughtful. I'm sure his goodness to me during my illness— Now, what further objection can you make?"

"I can't bear him," said Agatha, suddenly, which, indeed, was the conclusion of the whole matter.

"My dear! At your age! I *beg*, Agatha, that you will cease to consider yourself a baby. Such a speech as that, if you *were* a baby, might pass muster, but for a girl who has seen her twentieth year it sounds simply foolish. Why, when I was your age I had had six proposals. And you—have you had a single proposal, save this most fortunate one?"

She paused. Agatha did not answer. Meantime, Mrs. Greatorex waited relentlessly.

"Well?" she said.

"No." The answer was very faint, and it awoke in Mrs. Greatorex's mind a suspicion. Was the girl deceiving her? Was there an actual engagement between her and Dr. Dillwyn?

"No? Are you sure, Agatha? It seemed to me that you hesitated. I hope there is nothing in a certain absurd report I have heard about you and Dr. Dillwyn."

"There is nothing to say," said she in a low, anguished voice. Oh, that there *had* been!

"I am at liberty, then," said her tormentor, "to tell Dr. Darkham that you are absolutely *free*—that you care for nobody— that your heart is still your own to dispose of? I may tell him that you have never felt so much as a passing fancy for this young man, Dr. Dillwyn, who has been sent here through a whim of Reginald Greatorex—to starve, as far as I can see; for Dr. Darkham, as you know, has all the paying practice, and Reginald Greatorex"—bitterly—"as you also know, is a false friend, and a man that would rather die than part with a penny. I may tell Dr. Darkham that?"

Agatha, pale as death, lifted up her eyes and looked at her.

"Not that," she said; "do not tell him that. I—" she grew whiter and whiter, but she was true to herself and her own heart to the last—"I love Dr. Dillwyn."

"Agatha!" Mrs. Greatorex rose, and stood before her, filled with wrathful horror. To tell the truth, she was genuinely shocked. Her narrow prejudices could not conceive such a thing as this.

"When he has never spoken to you—never—"

"I know. It is—it *sounds* dreadful," said the girl wildly.

"But"—folding her hands upon her breast—"he will speak. He *will*."

There was silence.

"I trust not. I believe not," said Mrs. Greatorex at last. Her tone was cold, and there was a certain element of disgust in it that hurt the girl to her very soul. Why—*why* had she spoken? And yet to deny him! She would suffer for it, but hers was the nobler part, and in the end she would be placed above shame. But if he *never* spoke! A cold wind seemed to creep over her, chilling her through and through. It was her one doubt of him, and it died at birth, but she always repented herself for it. "In the meantime, Agatha, you must permit me to say that I am horrified beyond words at your confession."

"I shall never marry Dr. Darkham," said the girl slowly, miserably, but with great courage. "Let me leave you, Aunt Hilda. Let me go out in the world as a governess. I could make my own way, perhaps—and —"

"Don't talk to me like that, Agatha. You—my niece! Do you think I am going to have you spoken of by the people here as a *paid person*? No, you shall stay here." She rose to her feet and pointed imperiously to the door. "You shall stay here and marry Dr. Darkham, and thank God for your good fortune. Now go; leave me." She

pointed again to the door, and Agatha, sad and sick at heart, went out of the room.

When she was gone, Mrs. Greatorex tried to rest again upon her lounge, but failed. That slip of a girl to refuse such an offer as this! A girl who was literally penniless! She stormed and raged as she walked up and down her small room. As a fact, she had grown honestly fond of Agatha—as fond as she could be of anything outside herself; but she was fonder still of her ambition—and to see Agatha married to a man without position or money....

CHAPTER XIX

Agatha went slowly downstairs, and ate no breakfast. She went into the garden after breakfast, and tried to do wonders with a small bed of asters; but her heart was in nothing, and when she came indoors about half-past one and changed her morning frock, and made herself very pretty for luncheon, it was with a shrinking heart, as she thought of meeting Aunt Hilda again.

But Aunt Hilda refused to appear—which perhaps frightened Agatha more than all that had gone before. For Mrs. Greatorex to miss her luncheon meant that she was really offended. Agatha got through the sad little meal as quickly as possible, and then, snatching her hat from the stand, told herself she would go for a long, long afternoon upon the bank of the river. The Rickton river was about half a mile from the town, and there were charming little bits about it, good enough to satisfy the souls of most.

As she reached the hall door, however, the maid threw it open, and the Rev. Thomas Blount stepped in. Agatha could have hated almost anybody else for his intrusion at this moment, but Blount, somehow, always had a kindly boyish air about him that put an end to criticism.

"Oh, you, Mr. Blount!" said she, as if greatly pleased, and she took him into the small drawing-room, and sat down to entertain him right royally. Poor thing! With her heart as heavy as lead.

She was delightful to him for five minutes, and then she felt the strain was very great. It suddenly occurred to her that there were some engravings hung in the little antechamber, where she had so

often—she shuddered now at the remembrance of it—so often had to stand *tête à tête* with Dr. Darkham whilst he gave her instructions about her aunt's treatment.

Would Mr. Blount like to see these old prints? She had heard they were valuable. Mr. Blount said he would like to see them very much, and she led him into the little chamber. He and she were standing on the threshold of it, however, when the opening of the drawing-room door beyond caught Agatha's ear.

"Some visitors, I am afraid, Mr. Blount," she said gently.

"Forgive me for a moment. You can see the pictures there"—pointing to them—"for yourself."

"Pray don't think of me," said Blount. "I shall give my whole attention to these."

But did he? Agatha had gone back to the drawing-room to find Elfrida rushing towards her.

"Isn't it beautiful?" cried that small person, precipitating herself upon Agatha's neck. "Isn't it all it ought to be?" She surrendered Agatha's neck here, and stood back from her, looking at her in, evidently, brilliant spirits, and the latest Parisian gown. "I'm going to be a bona-fide countess! A real live one, too. You may put anything you like on that. Lively shall be the word for me. If he thinks he's going to keep me down, and—Oh, Mr. Blount! You here!"

Blount did not answer her; words, indeed, were beyond him. So it was all over!

"I think I'll come and see your engravings some other day, Miss Nesbitt," said he, as calmly as possible, though it went to Agatha's heart to see the expression in his kind young eyes. "You and Miss Firs-Robinson must have a good deal to say to each other."

He turned to Elfrida. "You see I heard," said he gravely.

"Yes." Elfrida held out her hand to him in farewell. Agatha had not made even an attempt at detaining him, the situation seemed so full of briers. "And won't you—"

"No, I do not congratulate you," said he steadily.

When he had gone, Agatha said quickly, "It is not true!"

"It is, indeed. He proposed to me yesterday just before he left, and I accepted him."

Agatha turned away from her.

"I thought better of you," she said.

"Now, that is always what puzzles me," said Elfrida, not in the least offended by Agatha's ungracious reception of her news, but with the air of one prepared to argue the question calmly, even to the death. "Why should people always think better of me? I don't see how I *can* be better. What's the matter with me?"

Agatha looked at her sadly. Her own dull, miserable story was before her.

How could a girl willingly sell herself for title, or money, or position, or anything? And Elfrida, who was rich, who could defy the world, *she* to sell herself to that detestable man, for the sake of hearing herself called Lady Ambert! In her present mood it seemed hateful—unnatural—to Agatha. Oh, how gladly would she *give* herself for love—love only!

"There is nothing the matter with you," said she—"nothing. I won't believe there is. I won't believe, either, that you will marry Lord Ambert."

"I expect I shall, however. And why not? Auntie is quite delighted about it. Just fancy, she will be Ambert's 'auntie' very shortly!"

"Your aunt is naturally ambitious for you," Agatha said; "but you — you—"

"Well, I— I"—mimicking her gaily—"what of me? Do you think I can't see the glitter of diamonds as well as any one else?— and I hear the Ambert diamonds are beyond praise."

"What are diamonds to you, who have so much money? Why, you could buy them for yourself."

"Well, that's what I'm doing. I *am* buying them. Now, don't tell me I am not following your advice, after all." She spoke mockingly.

"If you took my advice, you would see very little glitter in Lord Ambert's diamonds."

"See here!" said Elfrida steadily; "it's no use your taking it like that. I know exactly how you feel about it, but, then, I am not you."

"But surely your father never intended—"

"Yes, he did; and I admire him for it. He said to himself, "What is the good of my girl having all that money if she doesn't gain something by it?" Remember how hard my grandfather had worked for it, and they had their ambition, you see—it was to make me a lady! I'm afraid they've failed there," said Elfrida, with a sudden laugh. "But, at all events, I shall be a lady in another sense. I shall be Lady Ambert!"

"I don't know how you can look at it like that. The throwing away of your whole life's happiness—"

"Don't you? Ah! but you see, you have not been educated as I was. Why, only look at the name! They evidently gave it to me at my

baptism with a view of my living up to it. Elfrida! quite early English! It speaks of centuries of dead and gone ancestors of illustrious origin, who, I hope, didn't sell soap."

"I don't believe you care," said Agatha reproachfully, who, however, was now laughing in spite of herself. "To make a jest of everything as you do—"

"Argues that I have no heart; and a good thing, too. Auntie sometimes calls me Frid, an extra petting of my pet name Frida. But really it should be Friv. I don't seem to care about anything, and I seldom think. I don't allow myself. It brings wrinkles—as I read the other day in one of those ladies' papers. Well, I must be going. You are the first person I have told of my engagement, but you needn't flatter yourself you are the only person who knows it by this."

"Your aunt will, I suppose, publish it abroad!" said Agatha sadly.

"No. Lord Ambert will. He seemed very flatteringly anxious to clinch the nail. I expect he has more debts than he knows what to do with."

"But, Frida"—anxiously—"I hope you will take care that he does not make away with all your money."

"You bet!" said Elfrida, who really, perhaps, ought to have been behind that counter; "*that's* all right. I shall help him to clear the mortgages, of course, by degrees, but without touching a penny of my principal."

She seemed "all there."

"Oh, there's one thing," said she, trifling with the handle of the door: "I am sorry I told you of my engagement before Mr. Blount."

"I am not," said Agatha bluntly, a little sternly indeed. "I am glad he knows. You would never have told him until the last moment if you

had had your own way." If she had thought to overwhelm Elfrida by this harsh judgement, or reduce her to a sense of shame, she found herself mistaken.

"You're a witch!" said that naughty little person, with a gay grimace. "I think I seldom met so nice a—a friend as Mr. Blount. What a pity I must lose him now!"

"You have Lord Ambert instead," said Agatha coldly. In her heart she loved Elfrida, but she was angry with her now.

"Ah, true, true!" cried the culprit gaily. She ran down the steps to where her ponies were waiting for her. Agatha, though angry, followed her. It hurt her to be offended with the pretty charming, lovable little creature, who was so wilfully making hay of her life; she even went down the steps and, without looking at Elfrida tucked the light rug round her.

Elfrida smiled, picked up the reins, and took the whip out of its socket. The ponies sprang forward. Suddenly she checked them.

"Agatha!" she called. Agatha looked up. "After all, I was wrong.... I *have* a heart.... if only for *you*!"

The little fair, merry face was pale now, and tears lay heavily within her blue eyes. Agatha, startled, gazed at her, but there was no time for more. The ponies were trotting up the tiny avenue, and Elfrida did not look back.

CHAPTER XX

On each side of her rose banks, filled with glorious colourings. Autumn, always so rich in variety, was painting everything with a lavish hand—all the tints were gorgeous, splendid, ripe. She stopped for a moment to gather some berries from the blackberry bushes, that were now laden with ebony fruit, and whose luscious darkness was well thrown out by the pale green clumps of the hart's-tongue ferns that grew beneath them.

Presently she turned the corner and came within sight of the river. It was running very swiftly to-day, being swollen by all the rain that fell last night; and leaves from the trees, yellow and red and green, were swirling down it, in the rays of a mad, hot sun.

She found her own nook at last, and sat down beneath a huge beech-tree, through the branches of which the light played merrily. She flung off her hat, as though glad to feel the air upon her forehead. One could hardly believe summer was gone and autumn well advanced. Far away in the wood on the other side the solitary figure of an old woman picking sticks, with a scarlet kerchief bound around her head, made a spot in the picture.

Agatha sat down and let her head fall into her hands. She knew now—now that she was at last alone—how badly she had been wanting to cry all these long, *long* hours. The tears ran down her cheeks and through her clasped fingers. She was so alone—so utterly alone!

A gentle hand was laid upon her shoulder. She started violently and looked up, to find Dillwyn looking down at her.

"What is it?" asked he softly.

"Oh, nothing—nothing!" cried she hurriedly. "Nothing, really." She rose quickly to her feet and tried to smile.

"*Tell* me," said he.

"Well, I have told you," said she, trying to be brave. "It is nothing. Only—sometimes—" She broke down ignominiously, and covered her face with her hands. "Oh, I am unhappy—*unhappy!*" she said bitterly.

"My darling!" said the young man. He did not try to take her hands from her face, but he drew her to him, and encircled her with his arms, and pressed her head down on his shoulder, with silent but fervent passion. He held her to him. "Agatha, you know I love you. I told myself I would not speak until I was sure that you loved me, and until I had something to offer you; but now, seeing you like this—if I can help you—" He stopped and pressed his lips to her head. "You *do* love me, Agatha?"

Agatha raised herself, and, laying both her hands upon his breast, looked at him. Two tears still lay upon her cheeks, but she was not crying any more. Her face was transfigured—a most heavenly light was in her eyes. Dillwyn looked back at her, wondering—he had not known she was so beautiful. He caught her to him.

"Is it true," said he. "You really love me?"

"And you?"

"What a question! It doesn't deserve an answer. But you shall have it. Yes, I love you with all my heart and soul."

"Ah!" said Agatha. A cloud crept over her face. She looked at him.

"*Why* didn't you tell me so before?" she said.

He questioned her, and then all the truth came out—Dr. Darkham's proposal, her aunt's acquiescence in it, her horror and fear. Her hand was in his as she told him, and the nervous little fingers tightened on his in the telling. It was such a hateful story, and she had suffered so. But now—

"The infernal scoundrel!" said Dillwyn at last. She was only half through her story then. "Why, his wife isn't three months dead." After that he heard her patiently to the end.

"I have been so frightened, so miserable," said Agatha. Something of the effect of this speech would have been taken away if a mere outsider had been addressed, as now there was not a touch of misery about her anywhere, but Dillwyn understood her, and drawing her hand to his lips, kissed it warmly.

"You shall never be miserable again if I can help it," said he.

"After all, Agatha, I haven't told you about the stroke of luck that has fallen to me to-day. I'm afraid I should hardly have had the pluck to speak to you at all if it hadn't been for that."

"Oh, Jack!" said she reproachfully.

"Well, I wasn't sure how it was. I could see your aunt was against me, and I don't blame her of course, and—."

"Then I think you ought. Fancy her wanting to marry me to Dr. Darkham!"

"A man like that! Well, that's bad, certainly."

"Yet you say you cannot blame her."

"How could I blame her? Do you imagine that any aunt would like to marry a girl like you to me?"

"I should; any aunt would be glad to marry *any* girl to a man like you."

This was delightful from all points, and a good deal of business was done on the head of it.

"But look here," said Dillwyn presently; "I haven't told you about the luck. Old General Montgomery has called me in."

"No!"

"Yes, last night. Attack of the gout. It appears they had known my mother, and had heard that I was enormously clever. I was sorry for him *then*, poor old man!"

"Nonsense. He heard the truth."

"And it appears he was dissatisfied with Darkham who was with him a week ago. There was evidently something queer about his last visit. The General wouldn't say much—he's a touchy old fellow, you know; but plainly he was offended. Of course, I shall patch it up with him and Darkham. I hate other people's shoes, but for all that it will give me a rise in the neighbourhood—the fact of having been called in, I mean."

Women are seldom magnanimous where a lover is concerned. Agatha now raised a quick protest.

"Why should you do that? If he doesn't like Dr. Darkham—and who could?—why should not you take his place?"

"It is only a momentary row, I expect. Darkham has been his doctor for a long time. But what I want you to know is that it will probably give me a fillip here; and"—he drew her to him—"that will enable me to make a home for you the sooner."

"A home!" said she. The very word was music.

"*Our home!*" He looked at her and she at him, and their lips met. "For how long have I desired this hour!" said he. "For years!"

"Weeks—only weeks. But—"

"Very *long* weeks."

At this they both laughed, and then he went on a little shamefacedly, perhaps—true lovers are always a little shamed at heart before their loved ones,—

"Will you marry me, now, as I am, Agatha? Will you take the risk?"

"What risk?" said she delightfully. "I won't let you talk of risks."

"It's a cottage," said Dillwyn—"a mere cottage."

"I love cottages," said she.

"There are only five rooms altogether."

"What can one want with more?"

"And I'm afraid the kitchen chimney smokes."

"All kitchen chimneys smoke."

"And I don't believe that girl can cook a bit."

"Then here's a girl who can teach her!" She laid her hands lightly on her bosom.

But they didn't stay very long there. Now Dillwyn had her in his arms.

"Do you mean that you are not afraid—that you will come to me — that you are mine really—really?"

Suddenly he put her from him.

"Look here, it's a shame!" said he. "You are sacrificing your life. You had better give me up!" He caught hold of her hands, however, as he said that, and drew her to him and held her fast.

"You had indeed. But if you do, Agatha, there's an end of me."

"Oh, Jack!" said she. She was laughing, but the tears were in her eyes. Quickly she released her hands from his, and then threw them round his neck. "I shan't make an end of you," she said.

....

"Well, that's settled, I suppose," said he. "But I shall always feel I have been selfish towards you. But, however, it's done now. And, Agatha, I wish you could see the house. It's a cottage, you know."

"I know. I've seen it."

"Only the outside. But inside it isn't half bad, and there are two of the rooms very pretty, and it is covered all over with ivy. Mr. Greatorex was very good to me on my coming here, so some of the rooms are decent enough, but"—shyly and tenderly—"hardly good enough for you."

"For me!" Agatha grew softly pink. "It would be heaven!" said she in a low tone. That he should think otherwise, that he should imagine she would not be happy with him *anywhere!* Was there ever such sweet folly?

"There is quite a nice little room on the south side," Dillwyn was saying, Agatha's cheek pressed against his—"a very pretty room. That would be your drawing-room, and the one opposite, that would be the dining-room. It is very small, certainly; in fact, the word 'dining-room' seems too grand for it."

Here Agatha sighed heavily.

"What is it, darling?" asked he anxiously. "You don't like the prospect? Certainly it is small."

"I'll tell you what it is," said she, looking at him seriously: "it is too good to be true—*all* of it. It will never be mine. That drawing-room, that dining-room, that whole lovely cottage, will never be mine. It would be too much happiness. You forget Aunt Hilda. She will never give her consent—never!"

"But she is not your aunt really," said he.

"No; but she—Jack, she has been very good to me. But for her" — she paused, and her charming face grew sad—"I might have starved. I cannot forget that."

"I shall not forget it either," said Dillwyn. "And if she ever wants a friend, I'm there. But for all that, Agatha, I've got to think of you too. You are mine now, you know; and one should think first of those that belong to him. And, after all, I expect Mrs. Greatorex is open to reason. Once she knows you hate Darkham, and that you love me—and you do, darling, don't you?"

"Jack! as if you weren't sure—"

"Well, I am now; and I'll come up to-morrow and tell your aunt all about it."

"Oh, don't!" cried Agatha. "It will be no use—none at all. She —she is bent on this marriage with Dr. Darkham. Don't say a word for awhile."

"And let you be tortured meanwhile? Not likely!" said Dillwyn. "I shall certainly speak to her to-morrow. We must make the way clear at once. I shall come up at four. I can't come earlier because of General Montgomery; but at four."

"You won't see her," said Agatha, with a touch of triumph. "She is going over to the Monteiths' after luncheon to spend a long and happy day with them, and won't be back until ten. I'm glad, do you know. I'm afraid of your speaking to her. I dread it. She will be so annoyed."

"Better get it over," said he. "But even if I can't see Mrs. Greatorex to-morrow, I *must* see you. She will be away, you say. I can come and see you for all that, can't I?"

"Yes, come at seven. I am afraid I cannot ask you in, however. She would be so angry. But if you will come to the garden—" She coloured painfully and looked distressed. "I can't even give you coffee.... I can do nothing for you," said she, the tears rising in her eyes.

He smiled. "You can!" said he. "Do you know you haven't kissed me once of your own accord?" He drew her towards him, and she lifted her face.

"Agatha!" said he, in a low tone, "I wonder if you know how I love you?"

"Oh, I know more than that," said she, with a little happy, shy laugh. "I know how I love you!"

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